

Harrison County, Mississippi



Improving efficiency and customer service with online county records

Benefits

- Increased efficiency and improved customer service through easier access to information
- Annual savings of approximately \$50,000 by eliminating need to keep paper docket books
- Additional revenue by providing online access to documents
- New records processed in minutes instead of weeks
- Reduced IT maintenance costs

Business overview

Located along the Gulf Coast, Harrison County, Mississippi is home to approximately 200,000 people. The county boasts 12 resort casinos, 22 golf courses, 237 restaurants, 42 cultural attractions, and a thriving fish and shrimping industry. The state's second largest city, Gulfport, is also in Harrison County.

Challenges

When John McAdams, the chancery clerk of Harrison County, was reelected in 2000, one of his campaign platforms was to bring the county's recordkeeping systems into the 21st century and enable better public access to county records. All land records as well as records of other county entities, such as the county tax assessor, circuit and county courts, and Board of Supervisors, were stored either on paper or on an IBM AS/400 mainframe with proprietary recordkeeping software. Images of legal instruments and other documents were stored on optical platters that were accessed through a jukebox. Scanning images into the system and accessing them again were both very slow procedures, there was no quality control, and modifications to the proprietary code were expensive if possible at all.

Need to provide faster public access to information

McAdams knew Harrison County needed a better way to provide internal and external access to county records, starting with official land records or instruments such as deeds, deeds of trust, Powers of Attorney, liens, titles, mineral leases, court decrees, etc. In addition to the county staff, other interested parties such as attorneys, title companies, and county citizens need access to such records.

In the past, accessing such records could be an extremely arduous and time-consuming task. For instance, a typical title search would entail going to the chancery clerk's office to view a hardcopy index document and, from that, cross-referencing every transaction on the particular land parcel to a 600-page docket book where the related documents were filed. If the land had changed hands multiple times, multiple docket books would need to be located and searched through to trace the various title transfers.

Business profile

Harrison County

Governing body for Mississippi county

Industry

Government

Geographies

County offices located in Gulfport and Biloxi, Mississippi

Business solution

Records management, regulatory compliance, e-commerce

EMC Documentum products

ApplicationXtender

Deployment summary

Almost two million land records available online, with 500,000 new records being added each year. Accessed by county staff as well as hundreds of attorneys, title companies, and others via the Web. Tax assessor, circuit court, and other records to be added in the future.

EMC partners

Advanced Business Systems (ABS), Wave Imaging Corporation

In addition, if a patron had a deed or other instrument that needed to be recorded, he or she would bring the document to courthouse and then wait two to three weeks while it was recorded, copied, filed in docket books, and then mailed back to the individual. Besides inconveniencing the patron, the county risked losing or misplacing the document while it changed hands.

Storage of all these paper records was also becoming a critical issue. Many county records must be retained for decades but, with shelves of 600-page docket books and a room filled with file cabinets, the county was quickly running out of storage space.

EMC Documentum solution

To find a better solution for capturing, storing, and managing records, Harrison County put out a “request for proposal” with a number of criteria, at the top of which was an open architecture. “We didn’t want to be married to one vendor and proprietary code,” noted McAdams.

After narrowing the potential solutions to four, the county called in the Mississippi Information Technology Services group (ITS, the state's IT purchasing experts) to further evaluate all four vendors. Based on thorough analysis by ITS, Harrison County chose Advanced Business Systems (ABS) to build a solution based on EMC Documentum ApplicationXtender®. ApplicationXtender electronically stores, organizes, and manages virtually any type of content and provides fast, security-controlled access to that content.

After cleaning up Harrison County’s existing land records database, ABS partnered with Wave Imaging Corporation to migrate the records to the ApplicationXtender repository. By the end of 2004, ABS had migrated almost two million images of official land records going back to 1985 and scanned in all the information contained in docket books. These records are available at <http://www.harrisoncounty-ms.gov/pro/landrecords/>. Eventually users will be able to access online records dating back to 1973.

Speedy scanning eliminates need for docket books, saves approximately \$50,000 annually

With the old mainframe-based imaging system, the county could scan only one docket book a week into the system because the process of adding new records was so cumbersome. Each page had to be separately scanned and indexed to an associated location in the AS/400 database. With ApplicationXtender, Harrison County can scan records much faster and more efficiently. Employees quickly and easily batch scan records and then index and attach the scanned images to the existing AS/400 database. Leveraging the Key Reference feature in ApplicationXtender, the AS/400 database is synchronized each night with the ApplicationXtender database. As a result, all the static data for each instrument—legal description, grantor, grantee, plot number, and so on— that has already been entered into the mainframe system is automatically linked to the instrument’s image.

“With the Documentum-based system, we can scan about 10 books a day, instead of one book a week, so we have been able to catch up on the backlog,” explained McAdams. “We used to always be two to three days behind in scanning. Now when we come to work in the morning, it’s all done. And what’s more, we’ve eliminated the need to keep paper docket books.”

Not having to buy new docket books saves Harrison County over \$30,000 annually in purchase price alone. The county reaps an additional \$20,000 in savings each year by eliminating other expenses related to docket books, such as paper copies of original instruments, copier ink and maintenance, additional roller shelving to store the books, and hours spent manually assembling the docket books.

Image-enabling legacy applications improves efficiency and reduces IT maintenance costs

Using Documentum ApplicationXtender Integration Module, ABS seamlessly integrated Harrison County's legacy AS/400 recordkeeping applications with ApplicationXtender with minimal programming. As a result, Harrison County employees can access records from the ApplicationXtender repository without leaving their legacy applications. Harrison County can still leverage its investment in its existing applications but employees can now be much more efficient with easier, faster access to critical information. In addition, the county no longer has to pay the mainframe software developer to hard code access to images.

Making land records easily accessible to all and creating additional revenue opportunities

Now county staff as well as attorneys, title companies, individuals, and others can search land records online from their desktops using a standard Web browser or from one of a dozen county workstations available to the public. Thanks to the Public Records Online Web interface, developed by ABS partner Exuvian and integrated with ApplicationXtender, users can easily perform searches using a wide range of search criteria.

Advanced search functionality helps users find and navigate information even more effectively. For instance, each search result is accompanied by referenced documents, such as assignments, releases, and deeds of trust, with links to both forward and backward references. In addition, when viewing a particular search result users can take advantage of a powerful one-click search feature: they can click on a name to retrieve all records with that name, click on the file date to see all records filed on that date, click on the subdivision to see all records for that subdivision, and so on.

“With EMC Documentum ApplicationXtender we efficiently capture, store, and manage county records and make them easily accessible to both county staff and the public. And because it has an open architecture and is easily integrated with other systems, we continue to find new ways to leverage it to improve our business processes.”

John McAdams, Chancery Clerk

Making records accessible online also creates additional revenue for the county. By law, Harrison County can charge a convenience fee for every page printed outside county offices. Because Exuvian integrated ApplicationXtender with e-commerce technology, users can provide a credit card number to pay to print documents stored in the ApplicationXtender repository from their desktops. Harrison County has given several hundred “power users” the ability to purchase blocks of documents for a discount, either at the e-commerce site or at the County Clerk's office.

“ApplicationXtender has also allowed us to provide online access to offline data,” said McAdams. Some departments, such as the tax assessor's office and some of the courts, purge all but the current year's records each year. Every now and then, however, there is a need to access a history of that archived information. For instance, a tax assessor employee may need to trace the history of a particular parcel of land for a homestead exemption application. In the past, the employee would have to manually pull all the related records for that parcel from a box in a warehouse. Today users can access this historical information directly from ApplicationXtender because although the data file record has been purged from the AS/400, users can bypass the mainframe and look directly into the ApplicationXtender repository to view a comprehensive record that includes all scanned documents.

Turnaround time decreased from weeks to minutes

Today a patron can walk in the door of the courthouse, hand over a deed; have that deed scanned, assigned a unique number, and stamped with an official stamp that it has been received and recorded; and walk out the door with it—all within minutes instead of weeks. Using the ApplicationXtender annotation feature, the person recording the deed “rubber stamps” the electronic copy with the date received, and quality control personnel stamp it to note any discrepancies in the legal description or in the title name before it is available for public viewing.

Planning for future gains

Harrison County plans to upgrade its existing version of ApplicationXtender to the current version in the near future to take advantage of additional features such as the ability to select and print page ranges within a document and the ability to modify the “rubber stamp” capability on the fly. In the future, Harrison County also plans to use ApplicationXtender to enable viewing and purchasing of documents from the tax assessor’s office and court departments as well as Board of Supervisors meeting minutes and other useful information.

Summary

Thanks to EMC Documentum ApplicationXtender, Harrison County has made county records easily accessible to both county staff and the public, increasing efficiency internally and customer satisfaction externally. New records are processed in minutes instead of weeks and the need to store paper is being eliminated. “And because the system is based on an open architecture easily integrated with other systems, we can continue to find new ways to leverage it to improve our business processes,” noted McAdams.

About Documentum software from EMC

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Customer Profile
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